

**A Study of Volunteer Firefighter Decline and its Effects on Sheridan Rural Fire Protection  
District**

Research Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the  
Executive Fire Officer Program

by  
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## **Abstract**

The research study identified that Sheridan Rural Fire Protection District has experienced a decline in volunteer firefighter membership over the past decade. The research paper intended to determine the cause of the decline of long-term and short-term volunteer firefighters within the Sheridan Fire District and its surrounding communities. The lack of engagement of volunteer firefighters available within small rural Oregon communities who are trained, equipped, and familiar with the community's needs became alarming. This research study utilizes a descriptive method of research. The research study uses literature and data to explore three research questions. 1) What personal factors have contributed to Sheridan Volunteer Firefighters leaving the service? 2) What organizational factors have influenced Sheridan Volunteer Firefighters to leave the Fire District since 2015? 3) How does the attrition rate of Sheridan Fire District's volunteer staff compare to similar size volunteer fire departments in Oregon? An interview was obtained and analyzed with the data recorded from the participants who met the criteria of current or former volunteers of what motivated them to continue or what influenced them to stop volunteering at their respective fire districts. The data was gathered and analyzed from the participants' interviews. The research results found that the study participants shared that their belief is that volunteer time commitment, work-life balance, and organizational leadership support are difference makers for the service commitments for volunteering to serve within a fire district. Recommendations from this research detailed options for future recruitment and retainment purposes of volunteer firefighters for lengthy tenures.

Keywords: volunteer, motivations, attrition factors, results, purpose, leadership

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## Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

The Sheridan Fire Department opened in 1886 as a part of the City of Sheridan, Oregon. The all-volunteer fire department protected two hundred people and encompassed forty square miles of timber and farming lands (Our History and Present Day, n.d., para. 1). Sheridan, Oregon, as a community, had experienced its share of devastation due to fire. On July 18, 1913, a fire destroyed an entire section of the South Side of town (Brown, 2022). Locals determined that Sheridan Fire District needed to be a larger, more organized fire district to protect the growing population. The Sheridan, Oregon, area communities continued to grow outside of the protected boundaries, so in 1974, the Sheridan Fire Protection District was established; it consisted of a roster of an all-volunteer organization. The newly formed fire protection district protected 146 square miles of forest, farming, and home sites. There were 45 members proudly serving their neighborhood. The purpose of the fire protection district was to stop the loss of life and property by fire in communities, timber lands, farm homes, and local businesses with an all-volunteer force. Today, the local firefighting force's demographics have vastly changed.

Sheridan Rural Fire Protection Fire District, as of January 1, 2023, has 15 volunteers on the roster, eight of whom are considered active. Also, as of January 1, 2023, Sheridan Rural Fire Protection District employs 15 career cross-trained firefighters to staff a centrally located fire station to meet the ever-increasing demand for services throughout the 146-square-mile district. The current staffing model calls for an increase of six firefighters to meet the minimum NFPA 1720 standards, which are requirements for volunteer-staffed or combination-staffed departments.

NFPA 1720 (2020), This standard contains minimum requirements for the organization and deployment of fire suppression operations, emergency medical operations, and

special operations to the public by volunteer and combination fire departments. 1.1.1\*

The requirements address functions and outcomes of fire department emergency service delivery, response capabilities, and resources. 1.1.2 This standard also contains minimum requirements for managing resources and systems, such as health and safety, incident management, training, communications, and pre-incident planning. 1.1.3 This standard addresses the strategic and system issues involving the organization, operation, and deployment of a fire department and does not address tactical operations at a specific emergency incident. 1.1.4 This standard does not address fire prevention, community education, fire investigations, support services, personnel management, and budgeting.

During the business hours of the Sheridan Rural Fire Protection District, 6 a.m. until 6 p.m., the volunteer firefighters of Sheridan all have full-time, daytime jobs, with several of them working a swing shift at the local federal prison. Therefore, the availability of Sheridan's volunteers is unknown, day or night.

### **Background**

The current State of Oregon Volunteer Fire Service membership has experienced a sharp decline in involvement over the past decade; some have suggested as much as 12% from 2005 to 2010 in Oregon alone (Brown, 2022, para. 1). Sheridan Rural Fire Protection District has experienced the same numbers of losses to its volunteer force. Within the State of Oregon are 308 fire departments and districts: volunteer, partially volunteer and career (combination), and totally career organizations. Unfortunately, rural fire protection districts have taken the brunt of the fall of volunteerism. Most rural fire protection districts in Oregon are staffed entirely with volunteers or are a combination of paid and volunteer personnel. The State of Oregon, as of February 2023, has 158 volunteer or combination career organizations registered with the State

of Oregon Volunteer Firefighter Association (Volunteer Membership Within the State of Oregon, 2023, Table 1.0). An additional 119 volunteer organizations did not register. The reasoning for not registering has not yet been made evident.

In comparison, the number of total career fire organizations in Oregon is 31. The career organizations represent 10% of the entire fire service personnel within the State of Oregon (National Fire Department Registry Quick Facts, n.d.). In a mere 40 years, the volunteer firefighting membership at Sheridan Fire Protection District has declined from 25 members to 15 members, with six active members responding to requests for service regularly. The lack of volunteer involvement has placed a financial and personnel burden on the Sheridan Fire District, potentially putting firefighters' and citizens' lives at risk. During the daytime business hours, there are not many volunteers available to assist the career personnel with the multiple requests for service that occur every day. From 2021 to now, the yearly calls have increased by 300 additional calls for service. The lack of volunteers has burdened the fire district with adequately providing the most basic services to its customers; in some cases, outside fire and EMS agencies respond to Sheridan to provide mutual aid assistance to cover multiple requests for service that Sheridan Fire District is unable to cover with adequate personnel. The additional calls for help place a strain on other organizations that are experiencing these same types of issues. The lack of volunteer availability has recently forced the Sheridan Rural Fire Protection District to hire additional career staff to cover these multiple requests for assistance during the day; at the beginning of the year, these personnel costs were not forecasted and budgeted. The extra personnel cost has placed a strain on the district's budget.

## **Significance of the Study**

The lack of volunteer involvement at the rural level in the Sheridan Rural Fire Protection District has caused a financial burden on the fire district; volunteers comprised 75% of the area's firefighting workforce in the early 1980s. That number has decreased to 25% (Wolton, 2022). Without the involvement of area volunteers, the rural fire district now must hire additional personnel to meet the increasing requests for service. As the declining trend continues, the sustainability of a special fire district becomes questionable without some form of financial relief or an emergency increase of local volunteers that can respond to assist the district in meeting the increased calls for assistance.

## **Problem Statement**

The problem is that the retention of seasoned and fully qualified firefighters within rural Oregon, specifically within the Sheridan Fire District, continues to decline. The area phenomenon of volunteer reduction has relevance regarding its adverse effects on the budget, citizen contacts, and safety of existing personnel. Sheridan Fire District cannot afford any additional financial burden because the district is driven and supported by taxation. Therefore, understanding the cause of the lack of volunteerism within the community and making those corrections is paramount to sustainability within an Oregon rural fire protection district.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), the daytime population in the Sheridan Rural Fire/EMS Protection District is 6,000, which includes the 1600 inmates held within the only federal corrections facility in Oregon. It does not account for the thousands of travelers who commute through the fire district daily. For example, 15,000 people travel through the fire

district on their way to the Pacific Ocean every weekend, and many travel in the opposite direction to the Cascade Mountains (Highways 18 and 22 Report, 2021). The highway traffic and frequent transient population occasionally overwhelm the fire and EMS systems. Volunteers' lack of within-district assistance has exceeded the combined fire district's capabilities to serve the community and its transient travelers. The paucity of volunteer engagement has started to have a negative fiscal impact. Additional paid personnel may be required to meet the daily service requests.

In addition, the added cost of career firefighters places a financial strain on the tax-funded organization. For example, one career firefighter costs the fire district \$100,000 annually. The total price includes the base salary, health insurance, retirement benefits, training, and equipping the firefighter with personal protective equipment and uniforms—hiring three firefighters in Sheridan, one for each shift, is standard. In fiscal years 2021 and 2022, the Sheridan Rural Fire Protection District hired six new firefighters, which increased the personnel costs of the budget by approximately \$625,000.00.

Sheridan has three shifts: an A, B, and C shift. All career firefighters are cross-trained as emergency medical providers as well. They work 48 hours on duty and are off for 96 hours (two days on, four days off). The firefighting staff prefers these hours to maximize their work-life balance obligations, mainly the amount of time off. At the time of this study, the Sheridan Firefighters Union Local 5384 is reviewing data to present the pros and cons of the current schedule. The retrieved data pertains to firefighter health and safety and how longer shifts' sleep cycles and stressors affect the employees.

As with most organizations in the United States, the call volume in the Sheridan Fire District is mostly emergency medical responses. Therefore, the certification levels of employees

must be at a minimum of Emergency Medical Technician, with a vast majority of these certified at the paramedic level to meet rural demands for advanced service delivery before customers can obtain definitive care at the appropriate destination hospitals. Only three Sheridan volunteer firefighters have an emergency medical technician certification or higher. As stated earlier, a large majority of service requests are emergency medical, and non-EMS-certified volunteers are unavailable for these types of calls for service.

An emergency medical technician class in Oregon is 120 hours of classroom and didactic skills. An Oregon EMT's maintenance hours are 24 hours per year to maintain the certification (EMS Provider Licensure, n.d.). A volunteer EMS core group in rural areas of Oregon is scarce. The availability of people who can be on call day and night and maintain all required certification hours is challenging for volunteers everywhere (Hanson, B., et al., 2011).

Volunteer firefighters within Oregon must be certified at the same hourly rates as career firefighters in Oregon. The same agency governs both. The firefighting regulating agency is the Oregon Department of Public Safety and Standards. This regulating body sets the standards for fire service education at all levels in Oregon. The requirements for a volunteer firefighter to become certified are the same hourly amount as a career firefighter. Accordingly, the time commitment for fire certification is difficult to obtain and even more challenging to maintain. The requirements for firefighter certification maintenance are 60 hours per year (Fire Maintenance Requirements Summary, 2018). Another difference is that volunteers can become certified as non-career firefighters with CPR and First Aid certifications. To become a career firefighter, one must also obtain emergency medical certification through an Oregon Health Authority (OHA regulates all EMS functions within the state) program to become eligible for employment.

The 21st Century Fire and Emergency Services White Paper, by CPSE and ICMA, shares that future challenges to the fire service will be the retention of volunteers. Specifically, the researcher chose Initiative Eight sustainability from the paper. "Initiative 8: Research strategies to assist communities in sustaining their volunteer fire and emergency services or, if needed, how to transition to a new model" (21st Century Fire and Rescue Services, 2020, p. 23). Referencing this White Paper, it explains the lack of firefighters who volunteer throughout the United States.

The addition of peer-reviewed materials that cite the National Fire Academy Executive Officer Program's Terminal Objectives gives the research for this paper definitive appropriate points of reference. The researcher will use the Executive Officer Program's actionable objectives as a guideline. The Executive Fire Officer Program's (Executive Fire Officer Handbook, 2023, p. 2) mission, vision, values, and beliefs statement guides the research participant. The values and beliefs statement shares seven paramount guidelines to assist the researcher with an easy-to-follow glide path that prepares the researcher for clear expectations of the program's participants and to conduct themselves.

- Self-awareness through reflection
- Lifelong learning
- Integration of fire and EMS organizations into the whole community
- Development of sustainable partnerships beyond geographic and political boundaries
- Diversity, equality, equity, and inclusiveness to build organizational and community strength
- Fostering environments that support open dialogue and respect for opinions

- Recognition of the leadership role in the development of a vibrant and safe community

The Executive Fire Officer Program (*Executive Fire Officer Handbook, 2023, p.2*) accordingly shares that the expected program outcome for the fire executive to complete the capstone project will be to develop, maintain, and expand on these principles proficiently throughout their careers. The program's principles are listed as follows:

- Continual demonstration of social, self, organizational, and community responsibility.
- Enhance personal and organizational ethics, accountability, and positive integrities.
- Be a positive, practical, communicative leader who expresses an organization's mission, vision, and values positively.
- Plan for a safe, healthy, and resilient community.
- Having diversity, equality, equity, and inclusiveness be the trademarks.
- Be an educator and mentor and support the team's growth.
- Be an adaptive leader.
- Be analytical and purposeful, and influence and adopt positive political guides to support the overall public safety mission.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this research aims to examine the factors that have influenced volunteer firefighter membership to decline in Sheridan, Oregon, over the past decade. Qualitative research

was gathered by reviewing leadership traits, the atmosphere within an organization, morale factors, and how they affect the sustainability of volunteer membership.

### **Research Questions**

The study seeks to address the following questions:

- 1) What personal factors have contributed to Sheridan Volunteer Firefighters leaving the service?
- 2) What organizational factors have influenced Sheridan Volunteer Firefighters to leave the Fire District since 2015?
- 3) How does the attrition rate of Sheridan Fire District's volunteer staff compare to comparable size combination fire departments in Oregon?

### **Summary**

Organizational survivability lies in the balance of the influx and decline of volunteer firefighter staff in rural fire districts. First, the study of several factors that continue to cause a decrease in volunteerism with the Sheridan, Oregon, Fire District and their key takeaways will be shared. Then, Chapter 2 will provide existing peer-reviewed literature on the theories and research of volunteer firefighter engagement and disengagement motivating factors. Finally, Chapter 2 will offer literary-supported elements for the reasoning behind the decline of volunteerism in rural communities.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Introduction

The study evaluated why volunteer firefighters are unavailable within the Oregon Fire Service in the Sheridan Fire District's area and why volunteer firefighters have declined within the Sheridan Fire District over the past decade. The research finds that several vital factors exist. Volunteer firefighters comprise the most significant majority of the nation's fire service. The U.S. Fire Administration estimates 70.2% (U.S. Fire Administration, 2023). These numbers show more volunteers within the Oregon fire service than paid firefighters.

There are several rare instances where career firefighters are more prevalent than volunteers; this goes against the nationwide data. Specifically, the rural areas of Oregon, such as Sheridan, depend heavily on community members to volunteer freely. Without a vital volunteer source to pull personnel from, locating and engaging outside persons to fill the vacancies created by the lack of volunteer firefighters is critical. Exacerbating the fundamental challenge of recruiting and retaining volunteers within our area are the time commitments for mandatory training, sporadic call volume times and days, and the ever-changing work-life balance that area community members often experience.

Research has shown that many volunteer firefighters have the same time constraints as other volunteers and non-volunteers. It also shares that a major disaster or national event will positively impact volunteerism and increase involvement from new volunteers (Hasselmann, 2013). Furthermore, the discussion of what motivates, satisfies, and engages volunteers to do so has eluded many scholars. Clary et al.'s (1998) article shared that volunteers exude six general motives for their prospective periods of involvement. 1. Understanding - occurs when achievement by successful completion of hands-on involvement helps others. 2. Social –

Involvement with other like-minded individuals to make up a team increases camaraderie. 3. Values – Helping others out of concern for their well-being. 4. Career – showcasing one's abilities for future job opportunities. 5. Enhancement – The showing of self-improvement coincides with increased self-esteem. 6. Protective – Being engaged in helping others relieves types of guilt. These traits are essential to volunteers remaining involved and engaged within the volunteer fire service. This study aims to understand these motivating factors for its members and Sheridan Fire District's decline in volunteer membership circumstances.

### **The Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intention of Volunteer Firefighters**

History has shown that the inception of volunteer firefighting in colonial times provided a significant democratic function that was inclusive, desired, and supported for protecting the fledgling colonies. As Miller (2021) shares, involving oneself in a purposeful organization garners kinship. Accordingly, job satisfaction has much to do with volunteers remaining involved. Ownership and loyalty to a good cause lead to the satisfaction of the volunteer firefighter and are critical to the retention of those volunteers. These same firefighters also shared that one of the reasons for leaving is the firefighter's relationship with the organization's leadership. Positive involvement and inclusiveness with the administration made the time commitments about loyalty to the person and the organization (Northouse, 2019). Turnover is not discriminate; it occurs throughout all job classifications. The turnover intention for volunteer firefighters who voluntarily leave the organization depends on their direct relationship with their immediate supervisor and their attitude. Leadership has a direct correlation with the impact on the workforce. Insight into the correlation and involvement of the leaders to inspire, motivate, and develop employees through the leader's perceived leadership styles (Northouse, 2019).

### **Leadership in Volunteer Organizations.**

The administration of a volunteer organization drives the organizational culture and impacts most aspects of the group, including engagement, satisfaction, and retention (Malinen & Mankinen, 2018). Accordingly, (Hur. 2018) shares that psychological needs are also a factor in retention; this idea is akin to Maslow's theory of fulfillment.

It appears that leadership styles within the Sheridan Fire District repeatedly change due to continuous turnover at various levels; a culture of positivity and consistency does not have an opportunity to take effect. The review of this article shares that a theory of positive leadership involvement will lead to a consistent culture of positivity. In addition, the engagement of volunteer firefighters who need the satisfaction of participation and inclusiveness will lead to long-term educated and dedicated citizens.

### **Burnout: personal and work factors in Volunteer and career firefighters**

Burnout in the emergency services is not only reserved for paid fire and emergency medical personnel. It also dramatically affects their volunteer counterparts. The physical and psychological effects that accompany large amounts of responsibility that a firefighter and EMS provider faces due to exposure to emergencies take a toll on the providers (Butler et al., 2017).

Researching what factors cause firefighters to experience burnout and explaining those specific reasons by age, role, and work conditions contributes to the retention of those firefighters and the loss of those same firefighters is shared within a study from the International Journal of Organizational Analysis (Dias et al., 2022). The study references the difficulty in finding a key factor contributing to burnout. The paper acknowledges a gap in the literature used for reference, and additional information needs to be gathered to assist in proving the theories presented. Dias et al. (2022) go on to share that the number of paid employees and non-paid

volunteers that are available has experienced a decreasing trend since 2007; thus, there is a need to determine the fundamental factors in the decline of fire services personnel engagement.

Factors chosen for specific analysis included the exposure and the characteristics of vulnerability and burnout's association with this occurrence.

"A specific sociodemographic factor that has been investigated among firefighters is age. Global research has suggested that younger professionals are more vulnerable to developing burnout symptoms, particularly emotional exhaustion" (Aranda et al., 2019). The Aranda article suggests that age and commitment contribute to the disengagement of persons who offer their time freely. The hypothesis referenced within the Aranda article stated that age, socioeconomic status, and having a dependent family contributed to the increased burnout. In addition, the article supported and summarized that the socioeconomic strain and lack of family involvement had a great deal to do with the lack of work-life balance (Dias et al., 2022).

The continuous engagement of firefighters while dealing with burnout appears to be a leading factor in losing volunteers. While specifics of the causes will vary, the article shares that time involvement at different levels will lessen the potential for burnout, and younger members are more affected. Recognition of Social and Psychological weariness cues of burnout is paramount for supervisors to maintain awareness for intervention purposes.

### **Connection to the Community by Volunteering**

A community is a traditional brick-and-mortar township that exposes its inhabitants to a strong urge to serve civically. People from these communities are connected socially by in-person interaction and socially by online interaction. Accordingly, the interactions that occur use a globalization lesson that shows how significant or insignificant their involvement with an organization is portrayed based on the amount of their time commitment Hoffman et al. (2013).

Story et al. (2016) concluded that for decades, researchers attempted to answer the question of why a significantly large percentage of individuals engage in volunteerism. Several theories and volunteer motivation models are developed that show an understanding of what motivates people to devote personal discretionary time to volunteering. Accordingly, one must consider how each unique individual's motivational puzzle piece conforms to the influence of volunteering in their perspective organizations. The complexity of volunteer motives and influences remains a deciding factor as to whether the desire to participate becomes active or remains latent for the individual.

Recognizing the commitment of a volunteer for their sustainability potential coincides with what motivational factors exist within the organization. The reasons that motivate one to stay may not be as beneficial to others. Accordingly, the people not inspired to remain will soon leave the organization, no matter the positive or negative influences.

Appreciation and ownership expressed to volunteers through positive interactions before and after their service tenure shared by any means recognize the effort and motivate others that witness the interactions.

### **Enhancing Volunteer Experiences: Communitas to Improve Engagement/Commitment**

Socialization with others of similar interests is a powerful aspect of being a member of a group or organization. The positive interactions within an inclusive group lead to long-term sustainability within that organization. Conversely, isolation from groups of like-minded individuals that make up the community servant groups like volunteer firefighters has a profound negative impact on those individuals who want to be a part of something that expresses their overall beliefs, such as helping others in their time of need. Accordingly, the intense bonding among firefighters leads to a more significant comradery factor. Others within a community see

this group of citizens as people who love what they do and want to be part of that positivity (Curran & Taheri, 2021).

For example, Curran and Taheri (2021) share that many factors that influence these firefighters to bond correlate to product branding: the product is the people who are firefighters, while the branding is when there is an interaction with the product, and positive actions are the norm, and positive personal contacts are shared. Additionally, the positive branding within the community allows the volunteer firefighters to conceive that there is a purpose for their involvement within an organization. Conversely, when positivity within the community is not prevalent, the brand lessens, and those not satisfied with the culture and the community's perception of the volunteer firefighters lead to disassociation from maintaining membership.

#### **Effects of Workaholism on Volunteer Firefighters' Performance:**

Experiencing continual exposure to accumulative stressors incidents affects the most dedicated individuals. The need for the most consistent personnel to be involved in these incidents negatively affects the organization and the responders (Sandrin et al., 2019).

"Workaholism and supervisor recognition interacted in the prediction of emotional exhaustion. However, these interactions only resulted in a minimal increase in the proportion of explained variance, although this increase was aligned with the explanatory power of interaction effects typically observed" (Marsh et al., 2013). Control of the exposure of the most tenured and involved, no matter the responder's age, should be a concern of the organization. Being prepared to deal with accumulative stressors and intercede with these persons to support and propose a break in involvement will lead to a longer, more productive person and a cohesive organization that shares the load of the pressures.

## **From Fellowship to Stewardship? Explaining Extra-Role Behavior**

Community involvement by a volunteer correlates with fellowship, which in turn directly relates to the stewardship of a community. According to Schmidhuber (2018), an Extra-Role Behavior (ERB) is a behavior that goes beyond typically specified role requirements. Also, these behaviors are directed toward an individual, group, or organization to supersede an established goal. A direct correlation with burnout, workaholism, and accumulative stress on volunteers to continually provide results at a high level of success leads to a volunteer becoming uninvolved (Sandrin et al., 2019).

Going the extra mile by an ERB sets the standard for others potentially as unachievable for those who cannot meet the time demands to achieve positive results. The non-ERB considers the inability to meet these standards a failure. The non-ERB is now discouraged from continued involvement with a group or a goal while they struggle to meet higher involvement standards.

Stewardship theory, derived from psychology and sociology, explains human behavior based on individual motivation and offers a contrasting perspective on agency, assuming that individuals are rational beings who seek to maximize their individuality (Schmidhuber & Hilgers, 2018). According to the article, social motivators for volunteers are those individuals motivated by involvement and relationships that provide the interest to remain involved.

Schmidhuber & Hilgers's (2018) article argues that the stewardship perspective helps understand why some volunteers show more extra-role behavior than others. In addition to the hypothesized direct effect of PSM on extra-role behavior, it assumes that the strength of the motivation-behavior relationship depends on the organizational setting and thus formulates an alternative hypothesis. (p. 178)

## **Contemporary Expectations of Firefighter Engagement**

Keeping firefighters on the roster is critical. Therefore, in addition to understanding the initial motives to join, we must also understand contemporary expectations to continue service (England, 2017). What motivates an individual to join an organization that could get him injured or killed is complex. The factors and rationale that drive a citizen to risk their lives for others are both naïve and bravado intertwined, according to the 2017 International Fire Service Journal (IFS). In an earlier article, Clary et al.'s (1998) shared many factors for considering volunteerism from a generic perspective (e.g., volunteering at the library, a soup kitchen, a parent-teacher association, or a local recreational organization was regarded as the same action). The perspective was that volunteers are often underappreciated and very average in society. The differences between the two articles contradict what the IFS journal shares ego and appreciation as a motivator for being often seen as a hero. In contrast, some are overlooked, like the librarian and soup kitchen workers, for helping others.

England (2017) relates that volunteer engagement is related to family traditions, typically white male persons, with solid social bonds that share past and present ties. Accordingly, these traditional paths of retention and recruitment have negative consequences. The continued recruitment from the same pool of applicants loses its potential due to the insular concept of this, which is what we have always done.

Recruiting outside the usual avenues opens the potential for new blood, thoughts, and culture. The excitement of something new motivates the group to an Esprit de core concept, which serves as a contemporary/informed organization.

### **Volunteering at the Extensive Margin: Intrinsic or Extrinsic Motive?**

Two main types of incentive motivators occur when volunteering. One being intrinsic and the other being extrinsic motivators. An intrinsic volunteer is an individual who feels internally rewarded for their actions. Conversely, an extrinsic volunteer is motivated by an external reward (Modeste Dayé, 2018). The article shares that the most common volunteer is intrinsic. Intrinsic volunteer examples include church groups, social clubs, political party members, and social welfare volunteers. These groups are individuals who invest in the personal aspects of social capital that make them feel good about their free services.

The article goes on to share that volunteerism is a shared occurrence between the less fortunate and the more fortunate, one group has economic ties, and the other group has personal ties as their motivators. Therefore, finding the relevant motivator of the two and which Intrinsic or Extrinsic motivator will need to be engaged by a group leader with the two separate audiences to achieve the organization's goals is paramount to the group's success (Modeste Dayé, 2018).

Applying the concept of motivators for volunteer engagement has conceptual ideas of hero motivators, which would be Intrinsic—monetary motivators, which would be an example of an extrinsic motivator. Determining what motivates volunteers was not made evident within the article. The article's concept can be used with other motivators to facilitate a volunteer's involvement with incentives of various types to facilitate the needed responses.

### **Retaining Volunteers in the Age of Precarious Work**

Stefanick et al. (2018) state that unpaid labor within the workforce improves the global economy. For example, the Johns Hopkins Comparative Non-profit survey found that 190 million people volunteer in 35 countries worldwide; the non-profits they work for contribute 1.3 trillion dollars to the economy (Salamon 2003, as cited in Stefanick, 2018). However, the article

also shares that time constraints are the most troublesome for continued volunteer involvement. Emotional and social involvements are keys to understanding the alignment of motivators that long-term volunteers need for a positive experience.

Organizational goals that depend upon volunteer involvement will include a personal factor, a situational factor, and an interpersonal perspective model—establishing a positive culture of inclusiveness, safety, and an attitudinal environment that directly correlates with volunteering retention in an organization that depends significantly on these types of workers sets the standards for retention (Stefanick et al., 2018).

### **The Value of Citizenship and Service to the Nation**

The direct result of membership and inclusion in something more important than individual desires, goals, and obligations brings those searching for something more to service (Wong & Bonaguro, 2022). Accordingly, there is a relationship between membership and responsibility. The assumption across fields is that via social identities and group membership, belonging to a group can lead individuals to desire to promote the well-being of a group of its members (Tajfel, 1981; Simmons, 1996, as cited in Wong & Bonaguro, 2022). Furthermore, kindling a positive environment through solid leadership and membership support allows the members to have ownership of their organization's well-being.

### **Gratitude for Performance of Duties by Members (and Nonmembers)**

If benefits resulting from the performance of service are not payments, how do ordinary Americans see them? "Gratitude." The article concludes that some philosophers question whether agents who intend to receive a return in the future deserve gratitude at all or to a lesser degree (Card, 1988, as cited in Wong & Bonaguro, 2022).

## Synthesis of the Existing Literature

Gaining a perspective of the literature review through comparisons and contrasts will allow the reviewer to understand better the vast amount of information provided to the reader (Machi & McEvoy, 2022).

### Compare

Many authors, including Diaz et al. (2021) and Sandrin et al. (2019), have stated that firefighters deal with stressful and demanding daily situations. However, the stressors of this profession, even when applied to a volunteer firefighter, are not different from those used on a paid firefighter. The stressors are significant for the volunteer firefighter, who must juggle time management, home life commitments, and full-time employment outside the fire organization.

Many theorists have stated that any type of volunteer is challenging to recruit and retain today. The global economy is greatly affected by the lack of volunteer involvement. Volunteers of all types assist with a non-profit organization's survival and longevity by giving freely of their time. Making the volunteer's work visible and allowing forms of recognition supports the inclusiveness model and the retention desires of the organizations that depend upon these types of volunteers. (Sandrin et al., 2019; Stefanick, et al. 2020; Turner et al. 2020)

### Contrast

Supporting the idea that volunteer retention and recruitment are challenging, Diaz et al. (2021) and Sandrin et al. (2019) point out the importance of recruiting outside the regular pool of applicants and being aware of burnout and burnout ageism while continuously evaluating the organization abilities and its morale. Accordingly, maintaining engagement via support of the volunteer's mental and physical health allows the volunteer to feel appreciated and understood. However, others argue that poor leadership, a community perspective of the organization that

one involves oneself with, and critical motivators contribute to whether a person will volunteer. For example, poor leadership leads to poor morale and lack of trust; no matter the physical and emotional care given, a leader's lack of confidence will lead to disengagement. Also, motivators such as self-satisfaction with a job well done and some form of gratitude through compensation are the primary motivators that maintain the engagement of volunteers. (England, 2017; Modeste Dayé, 2018; Storey, 2016; Wong, 2022).

### **Summary**

This paper's literature review aims to provide multiple peer-reviewed and scholarly sources that offer non-biased data and use professional research sources on the lack of volunteerism availability in Sheridan, Oregon. In addition, comparisons and contrasts of the sourced information will be made to analyze the data from sources across North America and express their historical organizational needs.

The research approach has contributed to a fundamental understanding that several common factors affect volunteerism across the United States. For example, a correlation between time constraints and requirements and motivational actions to continually engage current and future volunteers have several mitigating factors. (Sandrin et al., 2019; Stefanick, et al. 2020; Turner et al. 2020)

Moving forward, Chapter 3 will detail the methodology, approach, study design, research instruments, study population, research process, and critical ethical considerations.

### CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

A generic qualitative study was used to determine the current phenomenon of the decline and retention of volunteer firefighters within the Sheridan, Oregon, Fire District. This methodology chapter will summarize and describe in sufficient detail how the researcher structured and conducted the research for the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Identifying the topic was the initial step taken, and the researcher determined that there was a critical need to assess the reason for the decline of volunteer firefighters within the Sheridan, Oregon, Fire District. Next, the researcher derived the subject's purpose from the need for additional firefighters that did not increase the fire district's financial obligations. Next, a literature review focused on the lack of retention of volunteer firefighters and how it applies in Sheridan, Oregon. Finally, the study of online materials from the National Fire Academy, National Emergency Training Center's Library, peer-reviewed documents from Google Scholar, and JSTOR (Journal Storage) is used to gather peer-reviewed academics using keywords to obtain existing literature for research. The search phrases that did yield the most results were:

- a) Volunteer firefighter retention
- b) The Decline of Volunteerism
- c) Retention of volunteers
- d) The Leadership of Volunteers and how it affects morale
- e) Work and life balance as a volunteer
- f) The Social and Economics of Volunteerism

The research of the available literature from the years 2017 through 2023 demonstrated that the subject's magnitude is relevant and identified concerns and effects on the fire service's lack of available volunteer firefighters. Therefore, the subsequent phase of the research study

was to evaluate the data retrieved and determine if there was relevant information that would demonstrate the reasoning for the decline in volunteer firefighters within Sheridan Fire District, Oregon.

### **Research Design**

The researcher used a qualitative research design to determine why volunteer firefighters continued declining within the Sheridan Fire District in Sheridan, Oregon, and why these occurrences have continued without change since 2015. The researcher conducted a generic qualitative study approach using structured in-person interviews with non-biased and open-ended questions. The researcher chose the generic qualitative study for its ability to ask researchable fundamental questions for their validity; a real question investigates the who, what, where, how, when, or why (Levi Martin, 2017, p. 17). A generic qualitative study gives the ability to view the data from a broad perspective and allows the reviewer to consider and validate the research for its validity and sources. The qualitative study method is used instead of the quantitative or mixed methods because the researcher uses actionable, broad-based questions to gather data. The quantity of data matters; however, the numbers or percentages of the data are less concerning than the factual context or the results of the reasoning of the qualitative question's answers that define the problem and then provide an ability to consider a practical course of action to evaluate the findings holistically. Creswell (2023) shares that qualitative studies provide the basis for the phenomenon based on the participants' views of the study's problem or purpose. The specific methodology used for this research study is constructivism with transformative worldviews. Creswell (2023) identifies that constructivism is the test of a hypothesis by identifying a culture-sharing group of like participants that have experienced a similar phenomenon in question while determining if there are shared patterns. Accordingly, transformative worldviews examine if the

issue is related to any oppression of the involved individuals. Finally, the interpretation of themes and patterns from the research study data is gathered and formed to understand the potential causes of the previous and current behaviors of the study participants who share their results. The researcher shares the results with a theoretical lens or perspective to remain non-biased with the data gathered.

### **Population and Sample Size**

The Sheridan Fire District is a small combination fire district located within the Willamette Valley in Western Oregon. The fire district has three fire stations within a 146-square-mile fire protection district. It has 20 paid, cross-trained firefighters who are paramedics and emergency medical technicians. It also comprises 15 dedicated professional volunteers who staff the outlying stations when available. The district has eight ranks: volunteer firefighter, career firefighter, volunteer lieutenant, volunteer captain, career captain, EMS coordinator, division chief, and fire chief (Appendix A).

The researcher requested to interview 10-20 current and previous volunteers from the Sheridan Fire District and surrounding volunteer fire districts using an open-ended, 11-question interview. Although the minimum number chosen was ten due to participant data saturation, the maximum number potential of 20 prevents the conflicting over-saturation of data due to the limited pool size based on the case sites used in this study. The data saturation model supports the fact that the data obtained is comprehensive. There is also substantial evidence supporting the studied phenomenon (Morse, 2015, p. 587; Creswell & Creswell, p. 98, 2023).

It is essential to recognize that the ranks in Sheridan Fire District are unique in that they have a volunteer and career (paid) equal authority in some cases. Therefore, the outside Sheridan Fire District volunteers interviewed supported a holistic data-gathering model. The researcher

also ensured that the additional volunteers from outside the Sheridan Fire District had various ages, genders, and years of experience to remain as close as possible to the in-district volunteers for holistic purposes.

The volunteer firefighter position is for someone who has completed a background check, a series of in-person interviews, and successfully attended and passed the State of Oregon Fire Academy of 120 hours of book and practical skills for an NFPA Firefighter I (non-entry firefighter). Volunteer firefighters must now attend in-person training for an additional 45 hours at their fire district to complete their training to become an NFPA Firefighter II (entry-level firefighter). Then, the volunteer attends an introductory first aid course at their prospective fire district. The difference between a volunteer and a paid firefighter is the level of emergency medical certification. The career (paid) firefighter has their State of Oregon emergency medical certification, and this certification is one step further than the introductory first aid course. No lieutenant position is available to the career personnel; this position is the specific designate used to identify the station officer for the volunteer sub-station leaders. Each of the two sub-stations has one lieutenant assigned as the leader. These lieutenants were assigned based on their seniority and overall performance for decades before the researchers arrived. The volunteer captain's position is that of a singular individual responsible for the volunteer lieutenants' actions and communications through the chain of command. The career (paid) captain's position is a civil service-tested position that requires the applicant to obtain and maintain an NFPA Officer I and II certification through the State of Oregon.

The criteria for inclusion by participants in the study are the addition of individuals from each volunteer rank level as described, with various ages, sexes, and social-economic

backgrounds used for the analysis. Accordingly, previous volunteers were used as participants at different rank levels within the Sheridan Fire District.

### **Instrument(s)**

The researcher utilized field testing of questions to validate the validity of the research questions. In addition, five subject matter-qualified participants dealing with similar issues reviewed the relevance and usefulness of the researcher's generic open-ended qualitative questions (Appendix B). The subject matter reviewers have relevance because of their current and past affiliations with volunteer firefighters and their executive and certified fire leadership education levels.

All interviews with the participants were conducted in person with written documentation quoting the participants using the peer-reviewed interview instrument as the standard guideline, ensuring that the same questions used to obtain all information were non-biased and ethically obtained (Appendix C). The researcher asked these questions of each of the volunteer participants.

1. What is your age and gender?
2. How many years have you volunteered?
3. What is or was your reason for volunteering?
4. What do you feel is the biggest challenge to volunteering?
5. What do you believe is the state of morale within the organization you serve or when you served in the district?
6. What caused the positive or negative morale?
7. What would you describe as the best qualities of volunteering?
8. What would you describe as the worst qualities of volunteering?

9. Does leadership impact whether a volunteer stays or leaves the service?
10. What impact do/did you wish to have on the community you serve or did serve?
11. Is there anything you want to discuss that we did not discuss during these questions? Please share.

The researcher contacted the prospective participants by attending the Sheridan Fire District's Wednesday night volunteer meeting and addressed all of its members while explaining the reasons for the request to interview any participants who wished to interview. In addition, the researcher provided each participant with a copy of the National Fire Academy informed consent interview form for review before the interview. Accordingly, the researcher attended the area's fire defense board meeting, obtained several volunteer participants to review and validate the questions, and obtained several volunteer firefighters from outside the Sheridan Fire District to interview. Finally, the researcher shared the researcher's contact information with the attendees. In addition, the researcher emailed those not in attendance with the same worded request. Also, the researcher attended the retirees' and previous volunteers' coffee meetings and shared the exact requests for study participation. The contact results yielded ten current and ten previous volunteers willing to participate anonymously.

### **Research Process**

The research study process began with contact with 20 prospective interviewees; 12 agreed to the interview. These potential interviewees volunteered in person, by phone call, and by text with the researcher to verify that they would participate in the researcher's study. Contact by the interviewer with the interviewee, confirming that they were willing to participate and

understood the reasons for the research and its process, is confirmed by in-person contact, by text, and by phone.

Once verified, the participants chose from a list of dates and times provided that would be available for them to interview; using this method would not cause further delays in the study. The participant's consent form was made available in person or by email before their previously chosen meeting time and date so that the participant could review, sign, and return it with the ability to ask questions about the process before the meeting date (Appendix D). The interviewer reassured all participants that their answers would remain confidential. A numerical identifier assigned to the interviewee will be the way to maintain their anonymity. Therefore, from this point forward, the interviewee is referenced as a number only, not by name, rank, or current relationship status with the district.

Before the interviews occurred, the researcher tested the questions by choosing five subject matter participants from the fire service to review the questions for clarity and intent of the study. The researcher used all information obtained to validate the questions and adjust them as needed to meet the moral and ethical purposes of the study (Aurini et al., 2022).

The interviewer conducted the interview as similarly as possible to replicate the same environments for each session, and each interviewee received the same open-ended questions with all additional and variances of the interviewee's answers to the questions documented by the interviewer. In addition, an interview protocol to facilitate all interviews as identically as possible is followed (Appendix E). The researcher will obtain all data from a semi-structured narrative data retrieval system, which is recorded and then transcribed for review (Creswell and Creswell, 2023). This method allows the spontaneity of the interviewee to answer the open-ended questions.

## **Data Review, Coding, Evaluation, and Storage**

Preparing data for analysis by the researcher requires several pre-planning steps before the actual data is received. These steps include preparing for the data's labeling, coding, and formatting (Aurini et al., 2022).

- **Labeling:** Label all field notes, questionnaires, transcripts, and qualitative materials. A label should include all information needed to retrieve and identify the data readily. The labeling will include the name (assigned number), location, and data collection date.
- **Coding:** The researcher identifies and codes the data that reasonably captures a wide range of research topics. A data codebook is a set of codes and definitions for data analysis. The codebook will maintain consistency across the coding process. The researcher will identify each code and include an interviewee's quotes. (Appendix F)
- **Formatting:** The researcher uploaded the data into a CAQDAS program, a Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software. The data gathering program used in this case is ATLAS.ti, which uses an algorithm that generates and formats the data gathered analytically to validate and categorize the data while being reflective of the words provided by the interviewees.

### **Data Storage and Protection**

All data is obtained and stored within a password-protected file on the researcher's computer, with a copy saved to a cloud-based program via password. In addition, the researcher will remove all personal information identifying the participants before the study's presentation

outside of the interview process. Accordingly, for four years, all data and personal information is stored (Trustees, Princeton University, 2023).

Finally, following Appendix E, the data was tabulated, organized, reviewed, evaluated, and explored for themes, and consequent information was obtained, and then detailed in a document without any personal references. It was then collected and attached to the final research study document for review and interpretation.

### **Trustworthiness of the Data**

The research data-gathering techniques used by the researcher align with Aurini et al., (2021) Analyzing and writing up your research data tips for good data retrieval. Accordingly, Meta-analysis for systematic qualitative research by Machi, L. A., & McEvoy, B. T. (2022) referencing the data's similarity, meaningfulness, variable, and effects of the outcomes and the research validity is used in the data gathering and documentation.

### **Ethical Considerations**

As an insider to the generic qualitative study, the researcher's dilemma has been to remain non-biased and not influence the study with preconceived prejudices. The space between the perspectives of conducting qualitative research while allowing the data received and interpreted to be of value and ethically sound has been studied. A researcher can remain ethically and morally neutral by clearly understanding the need for the researcher to maintain a position of both an insider and an outsider rather than view the subject from a dichotomous perspective (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). Accordingly, an insider working as the primary researcher and interviewer enhances the understanding of the material presented, and being from the same group provides a level of safety and comfort for the participants to speak freely. Assurances throughout the interview process that the

results are for data purposes only and that there are no assured outcomes or biases based on the interviewee's answers that will be shared.

Ethical considerations in research involving participants of various ages, backgrounds, and demographics carry a great deal of responsibility for the researcher to maintain proper morals and ethics to maintain the sterility of the research that provides validation for the data's relevance to the subject matter (Creswell & Creswell, 2023).

Research gathered during this study on the phenomenon of shared experiences by the area's current and previous volunteers was obtained ethically by the researcher by following the ethical principles and known boundaries presented by the American Educational Research Association's Ethical Standards of the American Educational Research Association's Code of Ethics (*AERA Code of Ethics*: 2011).

Maintaining the anonymity of the participants is one of the ethical considerations for the research data gathered. Also, minimizing any potential biases against the research study participants is paramount. Accordingly, ensuring that no harm can occur to the study participants by releasing pertinent personal information, including any identifiers used to identify the participants that are useable against them for providing information during the interview, is guaranteed by signing the release form and the ethical actions of the researcher.

### **Summary**

The researcher provided critical points of the study's research methodology and design and demonstrated a generic qualitative study with in-person interviews and questionnaires with non-biased and open-ended questions. A panel of five Chief Fire Officers who have dealt with volunteer retention matters regularly reviewed the questions before the interviewer presented

them to the interviewee. The study conducted shares that generic qualitative data provides the basis for the phenomenon based on the participants' views of the study's problem or purpose. The data received by the researcher, who was also the interviewer, was processed ethically as a responsible professional who engaged as a non-biased researcher. The researcher recorded and ensured that anonymity and ethically neutral data documentation occurred. The tabulation and presentation of the data as received were paramount for the study's validity and results. Furthermore, the specific methodology used for this research study is constructivism with transformative worldviews. Finally, the research allowed an ethical comparison of participants' views, ideals, and non-biased results by interviewing several different current and previous members of the fire district and several volunteers from the surrounding area.

The use of in-person interviews by the researcher as a research instrument with protocols in place ensures that the formatting and recording are accurate, with written documentation quoting the participants using the peer-reviewed questionnaire as the standard guideline. This quoting of the interviewee ensured that all participant's interviews were the same. Doing so contributed to the overall non-biased results of the study. The researcher manually inserted the data into the CAQDAS program, where the results are established as a link between correlating data while allowing a content analysis.

The researcher followed all provided ethical guidelines, ensuring the anonymity of the participants by using a known system that ethically protects them from any critical issues occurring against the interviewees while protecting their identities. In addition, the information is gathered and secured in two separate password-protected locations for at least four years.

## CHAPTER 4: STUDY RESULTS

This paper's qualitative study examined the current impact of volunteer firefighter involvement, their decline, and its effects on the Sheridan Rural Fire Protection District. This study examines the phenomenon of volunteer decline in a rural Oregon fire district for potential factors that may or may not influence volunteer firefighters to maintain membership or leave the volunteer fire service ranks altogether. In the study, Aranda et al.'s (2019) understanding of what factors motivate volunteers to maintain engagement within their respective groups contributed by the positive or negative mental and physical health issues is a consideration while reviewing the data's results. An additional hypothesis referenced within the study stated that age, socioeconomic status, and having a dependent family contributed to increased burnout. In addition, the theory also shared that the lack of volunteerism had a great deal to do with the lack of a positive work-life balance (Dias et al., 2022). Additionally, making the volunteer's work visible and valuable and allowing forms of recognition supports the inclusiveness model and the retention desires of the volunteers as they serve the organization (Sandrin et al., 2019; Stefanick et al., 2020; Turner et al., 2020).

### **Demographics of the Participants**

The researcher recruited the assistance of current, previous, and adjacent fire district volunteer firefighters. The researcher ultimately interviewed twelve volunteer firefighters for the study. Of these participants, nine were male, and three were female. The requirement to be a voluntary participant in the study is to be a current or previous volunteer firefighter from the Sheridan Fire District or a current or former volunteer firefighter from an adjacent agency.

## **Research Results**

The three original research questions by the researcher for referencing an 11-question confidential questionnaire obtained a baseline for coding the interviewee's answers. The interviewee's answers examine a hypothesis that several clear variables directly affect volunteer firefighters' retention and recruitment locally. The research results used a rigorous and methodical approach to obtain comparing and contrasting information as meaningful and valuable as possible (Altride-Stirling, 2001). The researcher used qualitative research, research questions, and a confidential questionnaire to guide the researcher in developing the interview process and the qualitative study's data results. The relevance of the research questions was reviewed by five educated subject matter experts who have explicitly dealt with volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention challenges and successes. (See appendix B)

### **Three Research Questions**

Q1. What personal factors have contributed to Sheridan Volunteer Firefighters leaving the service?

Q2. What organizational factors have influenced Sheridan Volunteer Firefighters to leave the Fire District since 2015?

Q3. How does the attrition rate of Sheridan Fire District's volunteer staff compare to similar size volunteer fire departments in Oregon?

The researcher used a semi-structured interview process of current and past volunteers from the Sheridan Fire District and its surrounding mutual aid partners—twenty hand-delivered interview requests given to various ages, cultures, genders, and socioeconomic types within the area delivered by the researcher for the engagement of the study. Of the twenty requests, a total of twelve interviews occurred. The researcher used an interview protocol from the twelve

interviews to ask the same eleven questions. The researcher used the interviewee's answers in writing to tabulate the data for coding the non-biased results.

The research sought to examine the phenomenon of the lack of new local volunteer firefighters while attempting to gain an understanding of the causes of the lack of new recruitment occurring while exploring ideas for the retention of current volunteers. The data's results allowed the researcher to identify what influences volunteer firefighters to remain or leave the fire service.

### **Implications of the Research**

The coded results of the research questions and questionnaire with their implications and findings related to the three research questions and the themes for each question are detailed below. (See Appendix F)

### **Research Themes/Results of the Data Collection**

#### **Research Question 1: What personal factors have contributed to Sheridan**

**Volunteer Firefighters leaving the service?** The first research question is foundational for obtaining personal themes and data that delve into some of the reasons for volunteer firefighters leaving the volunteer fire service and the difficulties of recruiting new volunteer firefighters for a small rural community.

*Theme 1: Current members' perceived lack of professionalism and generational familial differences prevent the recruitment of new volunteers and new volunteers from being long-term retained volunteers.* A common theme that the current organization is not as strong and is not as supported by the community as it had been in the past was shared by interviewees 1, 3, 5, 9, 10, and 11. Interviewee 1 stated, "When I got on the department, we had 50 volunteers who would leave work and respond to the station within two minutes. The volunteers today do not have that

same pride." Interviewee 3 stated, "We wore our department t-shirts everywhere. We were proud members; the pride is gone with the new volunteers." Interviewee 5 stated, "I enjoyed volunteering until a previous member's son joined, causing a ton of friction between members the same as his dad always did." Interviewee 9 stated that the lack of professionalism by the current volunteers and paid personnel causes others not to become involved in the organization.

*Theme 2: Managing the personal work-life balance while volunteering.* Theme two is one of the top three commented-upon themes. A common theme is keeping the family intact with all of the outside influences of children, commuting long distances to work, and keeping the significant other in their lives happy and supportive while they leave at all times of the day and night to provide free services to their community members before they serve their immediate family members. Interviewees 1, 4, and 9 shared similar opinions of the challenges that time, home life, and work commitments outside of volunteering are personally challenging to manage. Interviewee 1 shared "that the difference in time is sometimes minutes of availability for outside family or work functions, which does not leave time for additional activities." Several also shared that they had severe relationship issues because of the poor work-life balance when volunteering as a firefighter. Interviewee 4 shared that "the stress of trying to meet all the personal, volunteering, and work commitments was the cause of their divorce." Interview 9 stated, "Unless they change the time requirements or add more time to the day, I cannot find the extra time to volunteer and spend quality time at work and home."

*Theme 3: The perceived lack of traditional volunteerism.* The concept of volunteerism is someone giving time freely for a purpose, according to Modeste Dayé (2018). Several interviewees expressed that today's younger volunteer firefighter applicants do not understand what being a good volunteer firefighter means. The belief from the quotes shared is that the

younger generations do not care as much about their community as the previous generation. A quote shared by interviewee 3, "Young people today do not care about their community; they only care about themselves." Interviewee 7 shared, "The new kids do not recognize the positive traditions of our past." Interviewee 9 stated, "The younger generations are scared to commit and are concerned about how they look to others."

**Research Question 2: What organizational factors have influenced Sheridan Volunteer Firefighters to leave the Fire District since 2015?**

*Theme 1: The lack of positive leadership.* An overwhelmingly shared theme from the interviewees referenced leadership. Specifically, the lack of a positive leader, leadership by proxy, and the lack of support from leaders from within the organization supporting them by meeting their needs. Interviewee 2 shared, "I left after many years of service due to the hiring of a previous fire chief who openly opposed volunteerism. Interviewee 12 passionately shared, "If I could go back in time, I would make sure that fire chief (name redacted) would be fired; he ran off many volunteers before he left." Interviewee 3 shared, "Our volunteer officers were chosen for their willingness to do what the fire chief wanted, not what was situation or policy-driven." Interviewee 6 stated, "The captains would tell us what to do, then they would do the exact opposite, which started many fights." Interviewee 7 stated, "The leadership in the past was by popularity; a committee voted on the officers. One of the committee members was the chief. The results of the elections for officers were known before the election."

*Theme 2: The mandated training required to obtain and maintain their certifications.* Multiple past and current volunteer firefighters shared that the State of Oregon's firefighter certification requirements were too time-consuming and not realistic for volunteers to maintain. Interviewees made several specific references to how much training is required to become a

volunteer firefighter. Then, how much time and training it takes to maintain the certification?

Interviewee 1 shared, "A good volunteer firefighter is responsible for giving up their free time to train and leaving their family's free time and responsibilities to train." Interviewee 7 stated, "If I could just go on calls and not be expected to train, this volunteering would be fun." Interviewee 9 stated, "I gave every free moment to the fire district; I believe it cost me my marriage; that is why I left."

*Theme 3: The perceived rift between volunteer and paid firefighters.* Current and previous volunteer members shared that the paid firefighting staff did not appreciate the volunteers. They also shared that the paid staff acted in a malevolent manner towards them. Interview participants were not split on the perception of volunteer and paid firefighters' animosity towards one another. Interviewee 2 shared, "The paid staff take for granted their responsibilities, that most do not live within the community they serve, and that they do not have a personal relationship with their citizens." Interviewee 3 shared, "The career people only care about money." Interviewee 9 shared, "If we had more volunteers, we would not have to deal with so many career people." Interviewees 1 and 8 shared similar thoughts. Interviewee 1 stated, "These young people do not give a damn about the service; they only care about themselves and a paycheck." Interviewee 8 stated, "The paid staff act as if they are better than us; they think they are special."

**Research Question 3: How does the attrition rate of Sheridan Fire District's volunteer staff compare to similar size volunteer fire departments in Oregon?**

*Theme 1: A visible systemic lack of volunteer firefighters within Oregon.* Several of the interviewees said that their organization had experienced a lack of quality community members to apply for a volunteer firefighter position. One interviewee who volunteers outside the

Sheridan Fire District stated, “We lose more volunteers than we ever gain. We have lost six volunteers in the last six months; we did gain one new person who moved into our area, and he has promise.” A second interviewee from a separate outside volunteer fire district shared that, five years ago, they had twenty-five active volunteers, and now they have six.

The volunteer fire service has struggled in many parts of the United States in the last decade to recruit and retain enough volunteers to provide adequate services. With the mission of providing services to more than 70 percent of U.S. jurisdictions, volunteer recruitment and retention is becoming a national problem (21<sup>st</sup> Century Fire and Emergency Services).

*Theme 2: There is an evident shift from pre-2015 prevalent availability to recruit volunteers to an emergent need to hire and staff rural combination fire districts with paid personnel.* The final theme expressed by the interviewees is that paid firefighting staff are replacing volunteer firefighters more than they can remember. Accordingly, the interviewees also expressed that the community perceives the volunteer workforce as unnecessary because of the focus on staffing the stations with paid firefighters. All participants shared that the public perceives volunteer firefighters as prevalent because they notice how fast emergency vehicles are leaving the station. All participants shared similar thoughts that volunteerism, in general, has diminished and that something needs to be developed that better protects the communities in which they live.

### **Summary**

A generic qualitative study was conducted to gain a perspective on the phenomenon of volunteer firefighter decline within an immediate area. A group of 20 current and past local and area volunteer firefighters were contacted randomly, requesting that they participate in the

researcher's study. Twelve participants agreed to a semi-structured, non-biased interview.

Written permission from the participants was obtained prior to the interview's occurrence. An interview protocol of previously field-tested questions gathered data from the interviewees.

The researcher used the results of the answers from the twelve participants. With the use of coding techniques, pattern matching, and standard terms, the data was analyzed and provided in common themes.

### **Themes**

The study revealed several common themes from the retrieved data and research questions: (1) Perceived lack of respect on multiple levels. (2) Time commitments for attendance, training, and recertification are too much. (3) Poor leadership, mistreatment of the volunteers by leaders, and favoritism by leadership for paid staff. The following chapter will explore these themes for their implications and results.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the phenomenon of the lack of volunteer firefighter availability within the Sheridan Fire District and its contiguous area. The researcher's non-biased data-gathering technique, thematic coding, and meta-analysis of the interviews allowed the researcher to use a theoretical lens to analyze the data and its common themes to gain a perspective on its conclusions.

The researcher will provide recommendations for positive change and potential improvements within Sheridan Fire District and its surrounding communities pertaining to volunteer firefighter recruitment and retention.

### **Limitations**

The researcher found several factors limited the research, data collection, and analysis.

1. The results are limited to the available research, and the publishing/presentation of new literature is comprehensive in its content. The researcher found it difficult to be more specific with the research results. The researcher also determined that the generalization of the results was limited to the availability of a regional sample size to extract data.
2. Accordingly, the data gathered is locally based. The relevance of the data is specifically for a smaller population; it does not entirely share the sustainable correlation between local, regional, and statewide volunteers. Consequently, due to inaccessible access to an Oregon-specific volunteer firefighter data-gathering network, references to local and state-level validated analytics made it difficult for the researcher to verify the results.

3. Systemic negativity exists with current and previous local volunteers toward current and past local volunteers, which is expressed publicly. This negativity dissuades people from participating in continued research gatherings.

### **Summary and Conclusions Based on the Results**

The overall themes obtained from the data collection from Chapter 4 are summarized as follows:

- *Theme 1 - Current members' perceived lack of professionalism and generational familial differences prevent the recruitment of new volunteers and new volunteers from being long-term retained volunteers.*
- *Theme 2 - Managing the personal work-life balance while volunteering.*
- *Theme 3 - The perceived lack of traditional volunteerism.*
- *Theme 4 - The lack of positive leadership.*
- *Theme 5 - The mandated training required to obtain and maintain their certifications.*
- *Theme 6 - The perceived rift between volunteers and paid firefighters.*

The aforementioned identified Chapter 4 themes will be analyzed, and the interpretation of the application of these results is reduced to a manageable size and is presented below.

### **Conclusions Based on Results**

*Theme 1 - Current members' perceived lack of professionalism and generational familial differences prevent the recruitment of new volunteers and new volunteers from being long-term retained volunteers.* The interviewees of various ages, sexes, and experience levels believe that new volunteer firefighters do not grasp what it means to be dedicated professionals. The researcher has found literature that supports these ideas. Miller (2021) said that the engagement

of volunteer firefighters has diminished due to an overwhelming excess of time and training requirements that are to be met by a volunteer firefighter to remain engaged and involved. The research also found that the dramatization and depiction on television of firefighting as a glamorous job has sent the wrong message to people who are more likely to volunteer their services. Northouse (2019) shared that the lack of glamour and real-world results has dampened the realistic fire service for some looking to be revealed or depicted as heroes.

The interviewees also agreed that successive generations of the same family stagnate the ability of the organization to grow and evolve as the fire service requirements and expectations have changed. The literature shows that the lack of diversity within the organization stifles creativity and camaraderie and causes actual stagnation of an organization's growth. The literature research also indicated that organizations with a lengthy tenure of negative family influences dealt with continuous morale issues that evolved into the reluctance of new volunteers to show any interest in joining an organization.

The lack of advancement of a positive volunteer culture and a need for additional diversity within an organization is a systemic issue shared across many groups and organizations. At the same time, researching the best practices for positive culture and improving diversity within the fire service is paramount to a highly functioning fire district. Critical Issue B - from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fire and Emergency Service (2021) shares the difficulty in dealing with culture and its critical need to remain engaged and relevant in a positive manner to succeed within an origination. Sustaining a positive culture supports success, sustainability, and long-term volunteer engagements.

Culture is often defined as the learned behavior patterns of people – including what they think, say, do, value, and feel. Professional culture is the pervasive values, beliefs, and

attitudes that characterize and influence a profession's operations. The fire and emergency services culture is built upon a strong legacy steeped in tradition. These traditions are deeply engrained in how services are provided, the image of the fire and emergency services, beliefs about how they should look, and, in many cases, who should be included. Culture often drives decisions counterintuitive to what is best for the organization's long-term health or providing better services to the customer. At its worst, the focus on tradition results in resistance to change, adaptation, and/or innovation. (ICMA staff et al., 2020)

*Theme 2 - Managing the personal work-life balance while volunteering.* Time management for a person involved in any activity can be complex. The researcher found that Northouse (2019) agreed and shared that time commitments at home, full-time work, and volunteer activities must be closely regulated to safely fulfill one's tertiary responsibilities. A crucial choice is made on which aspects of a person's life must receive the most significant time commitments. Accordingly, the literature showed that burnout occurred in volunteers who overextended themselves, requiring a volunteer to choose between family, work, or volunteering. Volunteering would be the first service to be removed from the time commitment scenario; this frees up family and work time to fulfill the needs of the individual's family responsibilities.

The critical need to have a hybrid availability schedule to assist a volunteer in balancing their time commitments would assist a volunteer in scheduling any available time that could be shared with the volunteer fire district. The agreed-upon schedule of availability would reduce the stressors from the volunteer firefighter and allow the organization to gain the needed assistance to meet the community's needs.

*Theme 3 - The perceived lack of traditional volunteerism.* Without hesitation, the retirees who completed their interview and questionnaire shared that when they were volunteers, they all

worked locally and would be allowed to leave their place of employment to respond to an emergency. Accordingly, these same interviewees shared that they believed that today's young people did not share in the exact esprit de corp that an older generation had shared; it was all about the glamour and recognition, not the giving of free time to help out a fellow community member in their time of need. The literature shares a change in generational knowledge and work ethic compared to previous generations. Trust in the task domain of fighting fires is critical to firefighters. Trust is critical because firefighting involves high risk and interdependence (Pratt et al., 2019).

A generational disconnect of communication exists. Education and transparency by the fire district about what volunteer firefighters are expected to do would assist the citizens, retired members of the fire district, and the current volunteers to understand the expectations, values, and work expectations within the Sheridan Fire District.

*Theme 4 - The lack of positive leadership.* The researcher presented an open-ended question about good and bad leadership traits and how they affected retention and morale. Each interviewee shared similar stories and examples of poor leadership actions and their results. All respondents agreed that poor leadership led to a lack of retention and recruitment of volunteer firefighters. The research literature agreed with their analogies. The literature shared that persons who give their time freely need to have their basic needs met at some granular level. The research literature provides an example of data analysis agreement with Wong and Bonaguro (2022) that membership and inclusion in something more important than an individual's desires, goals, and obligations bring those searching for something more to service that shared the basic needs for someone to remain engaged and enthused with being a part of an organization.

1. Ownership – A person involved in an organization’s day-to-day operations at any level is more apt to have a propensity to remain engaged.
2. Growth potential - is when a person who is engaged and sees the relevance of their position in an organization must also have the personal and professional growth potential to support their growth within the organization to fulfill their needs.
3. Morale – A person surrounded by negativity and lacking personal and professional support will disengage quickly from an organization.
4. Leadership – A person who experiences poor leadership, lack of vision leadership, and consistently is not made aware of the team's goals finds themselves disinterested in remaining involved with an organization.

The knowledge gained from the qualitative study of the Lack of Volunteer Firefighters within the Sheridan Fire District and its effects has gained insight into the themes, causes, possibilities, and findings to assist with the knowledge base for a researcher directly affected by this phenomenon.

### **Implications and Recommendations to the Field**

Practical application of research obtained by exploring literature, interactions with interviewees, and recognition of the systemic issues that volunteer firefighters encounter in our community and surrounding area every day will lead the researcher to review current practices and make needed changes to improve recruitment and retention of volunteers.

### **Research Lessons Learned**

The data gathered from this generic qualitative research paper provided recognition and knowledge of items affecting volunteer firefighters within the community.

- A clear core values issue of past and present leadership traits is a factor in the lack of sustainability of current volunteers.
- A work/life/volunteer balance problem exists.
- Training time commitments are considered overwhelming.

The first step in changing the current practices within an organization is to establish a rapport with those affected; in this case, communication with all current and past volunteers, specifically as the researcher's literature research, provides an avenue to ask difficult questions.

1. What is the current state of our volunteer force? How many engaged and active volunteers do we have? Not just how many total volunteers do we have.
2. What is the current recognized leadership's authority? Is the chain of command known? How is the organization's leadership perceived? Is it engaged positively, or is it totalitarian?
3. What are the current time commitment expectations of the organization? How many hours are actually documented of volunteer involvement?

### **Implications and Difficulties of Change**

Historically, the fire service has had difficulty with change. Change can be the fear of losing control or power; some even say change is a loss of understanding. The reasons for making organizational changes are answered by asking and answering several questions before implementation.

- What changes need to be made?
- Why are we making these changes?
- Who will be making these changes?
- Who will the changes affect?

- When will the changes take effect?
- How will the changes be enforced?

Education is the key to success in implementing changes within a fire service organization. The more of the unknowns of implementation that are answered or explained before the change occurs will ease the anxiety of the change. Accordingly, these same questions, when answered, will spawn additional questions; one must be fluid when circumnavigating the fears and anxiety of change.

### **Recommendations for Changes: Sheridan Fire District**

#### **Recommendation 1 – Leadership**

Sheridan must reassess their leadership capabilities concerning its personnel's interaction. A complete assessment of policies and procedures from a third-party vendor will be completed promptly to establish a baseline understanding of the capabilities and needs of the organization's leadership. The culture of its leadership should be of servant leadership. The leaders within the Sheridan Fire District must place the needs of others before themselves. Accordingly, the organization's leadership should follow the basic principles of servant leadership by placing the communities' needs first, then the organization's needs second, the personnel's individual needs third, and finally, the needs of themselves last.

Some courses can assist leaders within the Sheridan Fire District in becoming better leaders. The National Fire Academy offers a Managing Officer Program. The program entails “first- or mid-level officer/supervisor, jump-start professional development early in their career or volunteer service. The leadership will build on foundational management and technical competencies, learning to address interpersonal and cultural sensitivity issues, professional ethics, and outcome-based performance” (*National Fire Academy managing officer program*,

2023). It is recommended that new and aspiring officers attend this course or a course similar to providing a positive foundation for positive leadership attributes.

A mentor for a new leadership program will be established to support the growth of new leaders within the organization. Policies, Recommendations, and Procedures will need reviewing, updating, and reforming to meet the organization's current needs and supporting the fire district's mission, vision, and values.

A process to promote fire officers from within the organization will need to be education and experience-driven. There should not be promotion by seniority or tenure. The promotional process should be fair and non-biased, with known educational and experience parameters in place before the promotion occurs. Validated and fair promotional processes will prevent family-driven and tenured-type promotions that have previously occurred (England, 2017).

Support from the board of directors, chief officers, line officers, senior firefighters, and new firefighters shall be given ownership of the culture change process to make it effective. The authority, while being fair and balanced of the expectations of the officers to the subordinates, will need to be policy supported with policy reviews at all levels occurring to ensure that the understanding from the district's personnel of the expectations of membership is supported. The key to positive morale is positive leadership examples to follow.

### **Recommendation 2 – Volunteer/Work/Life Balance**

Time management affects every portion of our lives, especially the time allocated for volunteering. As discussed in the literature review previously, it was determined that a critical reason for the lack of new or sustainable volunteering in rural organizations is the time commitment that takes place. The current culture within Sheridan Fire District has evolved from community first to family, work second, and volunteering last. Understanding and adapting to

this phenomenon will be crucial to sustainability. Additionally, an understanding and allowances for reasonable time commitments will need to be reviewed; the current philosophy within the district is that when one is off, they are expected to respond to the station for all calls, no matter how big or small they are. A time management project should be implemented that only requires the volunteer personnel to respond as desired or only on specific calls that require their expertise or personpower to mitigate the situation. There are also programs at other volunteer fire organizations that place volunteers into shifts or companies. These shifts/companies will have a volunteer schedule on certain days, nights, or weekends to be in service and available for response. This model is similar to the career shift work standards. This model establishes a volunteer resource group available to assist when needed; it takes the guesswork out of who might be responding to assist. This format also helps with time management for volunteer firefighters to commit to outside volunteering more comfortably as family and work time allows.

### **Recommendation 3 – Training Requirement**

The State of Oregon Department of Standards Safety and Training controls the hours a volunteer firefighter must obtain to be a certified firefighter. These hours are challenging to maintain by a volunteer firefighter who gives their spare time to the fire district; please see Chapter 1, page 6 for the training needed to become and maintain a firefighter certification in Oregon. A possible solution to assist volunteers is establishing a Fire Corp program, allowing them to choose a category that fits their time availability.

Fire Corps® is a national grassroots effort to help fire/EMS departments enhance their services by engaging with community members to assist with non-emergency tasks.

Whether they are conducting fire prevention and life safety education, installing smoke alarms, writing grants, managing a department's social media, or a myriad of other

activities, community volunteers can make a real difference. Utilizing community support helps departments increase their capacity and allows first responders to focus on operational duties, training, and emergencies. (Fire Corps 2023)

An example of an individual Fire Corps member is that the premise is to allow an individual to be a Tender Driver; their responsibility will be to maintain their training with that particular vehicle only. The Tender driver would be responsible for driving and pumping the Tender only. The only mandatory training requirements are maintaining their Department of Transportation documents to operate a vehicle of that size and familiarization with the district, policies, procedures, and operational safety measures. Having a singular responsibility reduces the requirement for an individual's time commitment.

Engagement of new persons at all levels will be essential in the sustainability of the volunteer fire membership. The days of having an all-inclusive full-time volunteer available are rare. Allowing someone to serve in any capacity will give the citizen the needed engagement and community involvement to help others. The engagement of single-source volunteers will assist the organization with needed tasks that cannot be met typically, providing growth and sustainability in the volunteer ranks.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

**Additional CRP – Leading Volunteers.** A research paper on the merits of volunteer leadership would be beneficial in assisting the needs of volunteers through positive leadership. The research found that leadership for people providing their time freely is a vast subject that needs to be broken down into manageable categories.

**Additional CRP – Time Management for Volunteers.** The research found that time management research is needed at all levels of engagement. From the newest recruit to the most

senior person involved, time management challenges everyone. A follow-up research paper on this particular subject would assist those who struggle with juggling home, work, and volunteer time commitments to help them better serve at all levels of their lives; time management would ease the stress and burden on those who would like to engage but cannot find the time to volunteer.

**Additional CRP – Training Requirements for Volunteers.** The research indicated that the requirements for volunteer training were among the most significant stressors on current and potential volunteers. A local, state, and national systemic problem exists with training requirements. A research project that details local, state, and national training requirements for volunteer firefighters would assist rural and semi-rural organizations with potentially dealing with these daunting requirements. A recommendation for meeting these volunteer requirements more efficiently and less lengthy in a hybrid of online/tactile measures with specific parameters that meet the minimum safety requirements would entice additional volunteers to engage in their communities.

### **Conclusion**

The volunteer firefighters of Oregon and the United States have a crucial role in protecting small rural communities from the ravages of fire and are the frontline responders for medical treatment until further life-saving measures at higher care facilities for the sick and injured. Small rural communities throughout Oregon are dealing with a fundamental problem: the lack of sustainability and new volunteer firefighter engagement. Volunteer firefighters within the Sheridan Oregon Fire District are no exception. The research results from Chapter 5 have shown that volunteer firefighters within the Sheridan Fire District deal with similar mitigating factors contributing to the decline in engagement at multiple levels. The chapter explored and

identified mitigating factors and answered difficult questions about where the organization is failing through an extensive literature review.

Chapter 5 shared the factors and the implications of the lack of a positive leadership component. A volunteer firefighter at every experience level must have a clear and positive example of outstanding leadership. The organization's responsibility is to educate the leadership to support the core values of an organization. Retraining or additional training explicitly dealing with the needs of volunteer firefighters for retention and recruitment will be a baseline starting point.

The research also indicated that the lack of time management education was a relevant hindrance to additional volunteer recruitment and retention. A clear need for a hybrid schedule exists that supports a volunteer firefighter to provide as much time as possible to support the organization and the community's needs. Research provided an example of a platoon, company type of schedule that allowed the volunteer to participate and to pre-schedule their time commitments, easing their burdens. The scheduling component also supported the research results that pertained to training time commitments. The pre-scheduled time requirement assists the volunteer in meeting the training requirements. Accordingly, the research provided an additional solution to the training requirement issue: Fire Corps allow volunteers to pick a specific task they want and have the time to be involved. The training requirements for a specific task are less than those of an all-inclusive structural/EMS volunteer firefighter.

Finally, the chapter also identified three recommendations for additional research projects, including (1) The need to conduct a research project on fire officer development and leadership traits to support volunteerism. A positive leadership component must be in place to support the organization's most vital assets, its people. (2) A research paper on time management

specifically researches volunteerism and its engagement components. Time management affects everyone at some point in their lives; a specific approach or guide that deals with these challenges would support future volunteer engagement. (3) The need to correlate the findings of a study that pertains to the local, state, and national requirements for volunteer firefighter training time would be supportive for the engagement and support of recruitment and retention of firefighters.

The findings of this study have provided a starting point for the Sheridan Fire District to rebuild its most needed asset, its volunteer workforce. This research study will allow future fire service leaders to provide a positive, non-biased understanding of a volunteer's need to remain engaged and supported with clear guidelines. Accordingly, it will provide future leaders with a better strategy for meeting the volunteer workforce's needs through positive leadership traits, ensuring positive morale. A motivated, engaged, supported, and emotionally supported organization will provide a community and its customers with the best possible services and sustainability.

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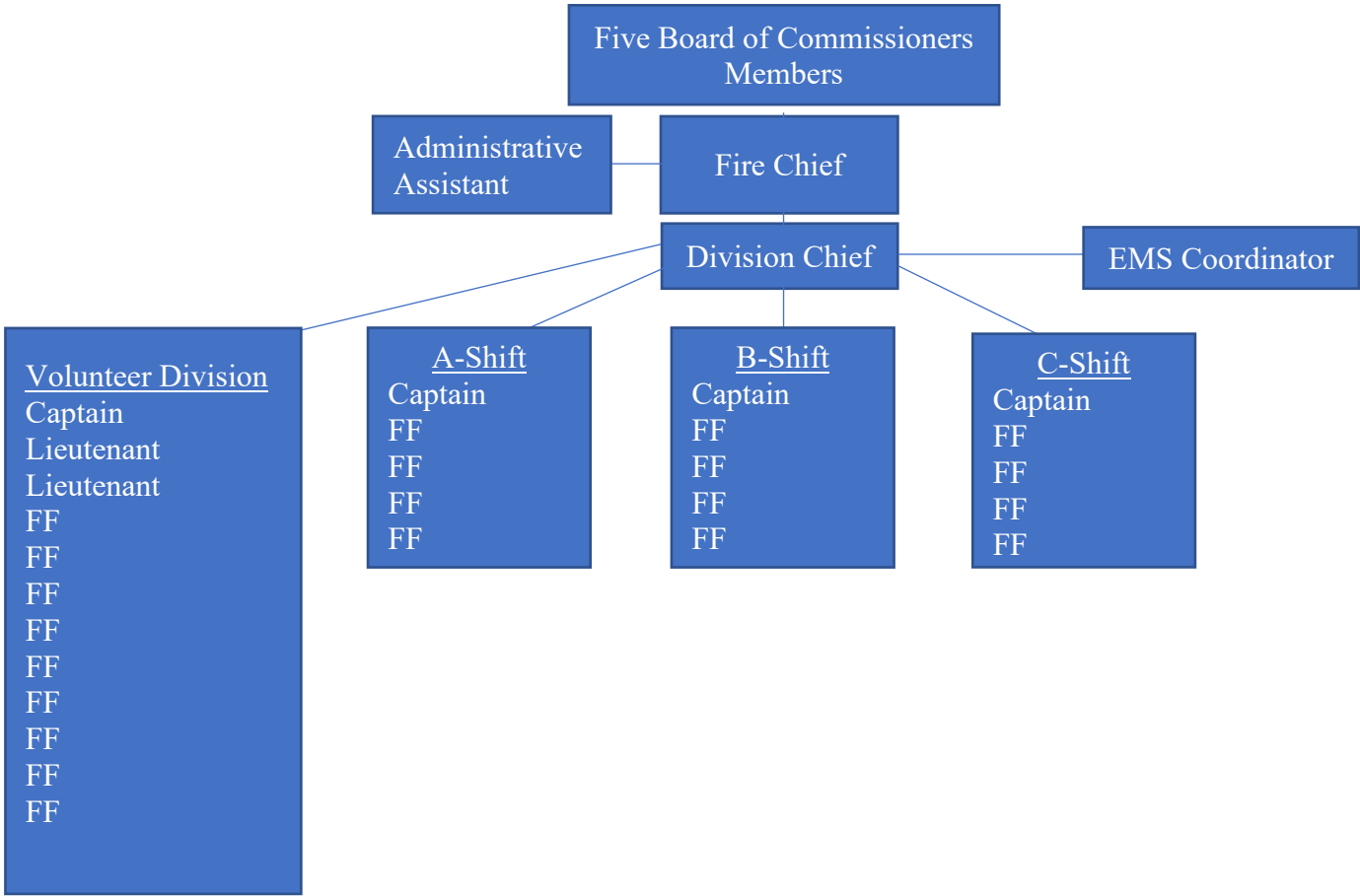
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**Appendix A: Sheridan Fire District Organizational Chart**



## **Appendix B: Field Testing of Questions**

The following individuals were solicited to assist in field testing the questions for the proposed groups and individual interviews:

Chief Kyle Taylor, EFO, CFE, FSCEO

Fire Chief, Kyle Fire Department, City of Kyle, Texas

Master of Business Administration

Chief Eric Thompson, CFO, CFE, FSCEO

Fire Chief, Medford Fire Department, City of Medford, Oregon

Bachelor of Business Administration

Chief Les Stephens, EFO, CFO, CFE, FSCEO

Fire Chief, San Marcos Fire Department, City of San Marcos, Texas

Bachelor of Fire Administration

Chief Scott Law BS, CFO

Assistant Fire Chief, McMinnville Fire District, McMinnville, Oregon

Bachelor of Science

The researcher thanks the subject matter expert participants for their time and assistance with reviewing and their help with developing and validating the research and interview questions.

### Appendix C: Interview Questions

1. What is your age and gender?
2. How many years have you volunteered?
3. What is or was your reason for volunteering?
4. What do you feel is the biggest challenge to volunteering?
5. What do you believe is the state of morale within the organization you serve or when you served in the district?
6. What caused the positive or negative morale?
7. What would you describe as the best qualities of volunteering?
8. What would you describe as the worst qualities of volunteering?
9. Does leadership impact whether a volunteer stays or leaves the service?
10. Any unaddressed concerns regarding this study?
11. What impact do/did you wish to have on the community you serve or did serve?
12. Is there anything you want to discuss that we did not discuss during these questions? Please share.

## **Appendix D: Consent to Interview Form**

### **Identification of Interviewer & Purpose of Study**

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Les Thomas from the National Fire Academy (NFA). The purpose of this study is to develop a better understanding of a critical issue in fire and emergency services. This study will contribute to the researcher's completion of their final project.

### **Research Procedures**

Should you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to sign this consent form once all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. This study consists of an interview that will be administered to individual participants. You will be asked to provide answers to a series of questions related to your experience within a particular community.

### **Time Required**

Participation in this study will require approximately 30 minutes of your time.

### **Risks**

The interviewer does not perceive more than minimal risks from your involvement in this study (that is, no risks beyond the risks associated with everyday life).

The NFA and its contractors take no responsibility for the actions or outcomes of the research study.

### **Benefits**

There are no direct benefits to the participant; however, information from this study may benefit your and other communities in the future.

### **Incentives**

There are no incentives (financial or otherwise) associated with participation in this study.

### **Confidentiality**

The results of this research will be presented to NFA program faculty and students. The results of this project will be coded in such a way that the respondent's identity will not be attached to the final form of this study. The researcher retains the right to use and publish non-identifiable data. While individual responses are confidential, aggregate data will be presented, representing averages or generalizations about the responses as a whole. All data will be stored in a secure location accessible only to the researcher. Upon completion of the study, all information that

matches up individual respondents with their answers will be destroyed. Final aggregate results will be made available to participants upon request.

### **Participation & Withdrawal**

Your participation is entirely voluntary. You are free to choose not to participate. Should you choose to participate, you can withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind.

### **Questions about the Study**

If you have questions or concerns during the time of your participation in this study or after its completion, or you would like to receive a copy of the final aggregate results of this study, please contact:

Les Thomas  
National Fire Academy  
Bfr309@yahoo.com

Dr. Justin R. Heim  
National Fire Academy

### **Giving of Consent**

I have read this consent form, and I understand what is being requested of me as a participant in this study. I freely consent to participate. I have received satisfactory answers to my questions. The investigator provided me with a copy of this form. I certify that I am at least 18 years of age.

- I give consent to be interviewed. \_\_\_\_\_ (interviewee initials)  
 I do not give consent to be interviewed. \_\_\_\_\_ (interviewee initials)

<b>Interviewer Signature</b>		<b>Date:</b>	
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<b>Interviewee Signature</b>		<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Interviewee Signature</b>		<b>Date:</b>	

## Appendix E: Individual Interview Protocols

### Outline of Interview Procedures

1. Introduction of the researcher
2. Educate the participant on the purpose of the study and how the information will be used.
3. Guidelines:
  - a. Thank the interviewee for their participation
  - b. Express to the interviewee their total anonymity
  - c. Explain that there are no right or wrong answers
  - d. Explain that the interviewer does not hold a position on the subject
  - e. Remind them to relax and be as open and honest as possible
  - f. End the interview with an open-ended question: Do you have anything additional to add that we have not already covered?

Adapted from Aurini et al. (2022)

## Data Analysis/Coding: Appendix F

Questions	Comment	Code Group	Quotations	Bibliography Reference	
<b>Q 1: Age and Gender</b> Age: The number provided. Gender: M = Male, F = Female NB = non-Binary NA = No Answer	M, 64	Interviewee # 1	Chapter 4		
	M, 61	Interviewee # 2	Chapter 4		
	M, 54	Interviewee # 3	Chapter 4		
	F, 68	Interviewee # 4	Chapter 4		
	M, 48	Interviewee # 5	Chapter 4		
	F, 39	Interviewee # 6	Chapter 4		
	M, 66	Interviewee # 7	Chapter 4		
	M, 73	Interviewee # 8	Chapter 4		
	M, 51	Interviewee # 9	Chapter 4		
	F, 51	Interviewee # 10	Chapter 4		
	M, 31	Interviewee # 11	Chapter 4		
	M, 56	Interviewee # 12	Chapter 4		
	***Declined-Did not interview	Declined	Interviewee # 13	N/A	N/A
		Declined	Interviewee # 14	N/A	N/A
		Declined	Interviewee # 15	N/A	N/A
		Declined	Interviewee # 16	N/A	N/A
		Declined	Interviewee # 17	N/A	N/A
		Declined	Interviewee # 18	N/A	N/A
		Declined	Interviewee # 19	N/A	N/A
		Declined	Interviewee # 20	N/A	N/A
<b>Q 2: Years of Volunteering</b> Years: The number provided. How many years have you volunteered?  Retired = left with positivity. Quit = left with negativity. Still = Still volunteering.	33 - retired	Interviewee # 1	Chapter 4		
	29 - quit	Interviewee # 2	RQ #1 = Theme 1		
	18 - still	Interviewee # 3	Chapter 4		
	39 - still	Interviewee # 4	Chapter 4		
	12 - still	Interviewee # 5	Chapter 4		
	10 - quit	Interviewee # 6	RQ #1 = Theme 1		
	23 - retired	Interviewee # 7	Chapter 4		
	41 - retired	Interviewee # 8	RQ #1 = Theme 1		
	51 - still	Interviewee # 9	Chapter 4		
	8 - still	Interviewee # 10	Chapter 4		
	5 - quit	Interviewee # 11	RQ #1 = Theme 1		
	56 - quit	Interviewee # 12	RQ #1 = Theme 1		
	***Declined-Did not interview	Declined	Interviewee # 13	N/A	N/A
		Declined	Interviewee # 14	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 15	N/A	N/A	

	Declined	Interviewee # 16	N/A	N/A	
	Declined	Interviewee # 17	N/A	N/A	
	Declined	Interviewee # 18	N/A	N/A	
	Declined	Interviewee # 19	N/A	N/A	
	Declined	Interviewee # 20	N/A	N/A	
<b>Q 3: Challenges of Volunteering</b>	Help	Interviewee # 1	RQ #1 = Theme 1		
What is or was your reason for volunteering?	Help	Interviewee # 2	Chapter 4		
	Help	Interviewee # 3	RQ #1 = Theme 3		
	Help	Interviewee # 4	Chapter 4		
	Help	Interviewee # 5	Chapter 4		
	Help = Helping the community.	Family	Interviewee # 6	Chapter 4	
	Family = A relative did it.	Challenge	Interviewee # 7	Chapter 4	
	Challenge = Challenge of firefight.	Challenge	Interviewee # 8	Chapter 4	
		Help	Interviewee # 9	Chapter 4	
		Help	Interviewee # 10	Chapter 4	
		Challenge	Interviewee # 11	Chapter 4	
		Family	Interviewee # 12	Chapter 4	
	***Declined-Did not interview	Declined	Interviewee # 13	N/A	N/A
		Declined	Interviewee # 14	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 15	N/A	N/A	
	Declined	Interviewee # 16	N/A	N/A	
	Declined	Interviewee # 17	N/A	N/A	
	Declined	Interviewee # 18	N/A	N/A	
	Declined	Interviewee # 19	N/A	N/A	
	Declined	Interviewee # 20	N/A	N/A	

<b>Q 4: Morale</b>	Training	Interviewee # 1	RQ #1 = Theme 2		
What do you feel is the biggest challenge to volunteering?	Time	Interviewee # 2	RQ #1 = Theme 2		
	Both	Interviewee # 3	RQ #1 = Theme 2		
	Both	Interviewee # 4	RQ #1 = Theme 2		
	Both	Interviewee # 5	RQ #1 = Theme 2		
	Time = Time commitments	Training	Interviewee # 6	RQ #1 = Theme 3	
	Training = Training requirements	Training	Interviewee # 7	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Both = Time/Training requirements	Both	Interviewee # 8	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Fight = Rifts -Paid/Volunteer	Both	Interviewee # 9	RQ #1 = Theme 2	
		Training	Interviewee # 10	RQ #2 = Theme 2	
		Training	Interviewee # 11	RQ #2 = Theme 2	
		Both	Interviewee # 12	RQ #1 = Theme 2	
	***Declined-Did not interview	Declined	Interviewee # 13	N/A	N/A

	Declined	Interviewee # 14	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 15	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 16	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 17	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 18	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 19	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 20	N/A	N/A

<p><b>Q 5: Reason for Volunteering</b></p> <p>What do you believe is the state of morale within the organization you serve or when you served in the district?</p> <p>Good = Morale is good.          Poor = Morale needs improvement.          Neutral = Not known.</p> <p>***Declined-Did not interview</p>	Neutral	Interviewee # 1	RQ #1 = Theme 2	
	Poor	Interviewee # 2	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Good	Interviewee # 3	RQ #1 = Theme 2	
	Neutral	Interviewee # 4	RQ #1 = Theme 2	
	Poor	Interviewee # 5	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Poor	Interviewee # 6	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Neutral	Interviewee # 7	RQ #1 = Theme 3	
	Neutral	Interviewee # 8	Chapter 4	
	Good	Interviewee # 9	Chapter 4	
	Neutral	Interviewee # 10	RQ #1 = Theme 3	
	Poor	Interviewee # 11	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Poor	Interviewee # 12	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Declined	Interviewee # 13	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 14	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 15	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 16	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 17	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 18	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 19	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 20	N/A	N/A

<p><b>Q 6: Positive/Negative Morale</b></p> <p>What caused the positive morale?</p> <p>Engagement = Ownership.          Leadership 1 = Good Leadership          Leadership 2 = Poor Leadership          Neutral = None or Unknown.          Fight = Rifts -Paid/Volunteer</p>	Neutral	Interviewee # 1	Chapter 4	
	Leadership 2	Interviewee # 2	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Leadership 2	Interviewee # 3	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Neutral	Interviewee # 4	RQ #1 = Theme 2	
	Leadership 1	Interviewee # 5	RQ #1 = Theme 2	
	Neutral	Interviewee # 6	RQ #1 = Theme 2	
	Leadership 2	Interviewee # 7	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Neutral	Interviewee # 8	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Engagement	Interviewee # 9	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Fight	Interviewee # 10	RQ #2 = Theme 3	

***Declined-Did not interview	Leadership 2	Interviewee # 11	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Leadership 2	Interviewee # 12	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Declined	Interviewee # 13	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 14	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 15	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 16	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 17	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 18	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 19	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 20	N/A	N/A
<b>Q 7: Qualities of Volunteering</b>  What would you describe as the Best and Worst qualities of volunteering? <b>Best</b> Team = Positive relationships Help = Helping the community. <b>Worst</b> Fight = Rifts -Paid/Volunteer Time = Time commitment poor. Leadership 2 = Poor Leadership. ***Declined-Did not interview	Help	Interviewee # 1	Chapter 4	
	Fight	Interviewee # 2	RQ #2 = Theme 3	
	Help	Interviewee # 3	Chapter 4	
	Help	Interviewee # 4	Chapter 4	
	Time	Interviewee # 5	RQ #2 = Theme 2	
	Leadership 2	Interviewee # 6	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Team	Interviewee # 7	RQ #2 = Theme 3	
	Fight	Interviewee # 8	RQ #2 = Theme 3	
	Time	Interviewee # 9	RQ #2 = Theme 2	
	Team	Interviewee # 10	Chapter 4	
	Fight	Interviewee # 11	RQ #2 = Theme 3	
	Leadership 2	Interviewee # 12	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Declined	Interviewee # 13	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 14	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 15	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 16	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 17	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 18	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 19	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 20	N/A	N/A

<b>Q 8: Leadership Impact</b>  Does negative leadership impact a volunteer staying or leaving the service?  Yes = Leaves, No = Stay	Yes	Interviewee # 1	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Yes	Interviewee # 2	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Yes	Interviewee # 3	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Yes	Interviewee # 4	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Yes	Interviewee # 5	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Yes	Interviewee # 6	RQ #1 = Theme 1	
	Yes	Interviewee # 7	RQ #2 = Theme 1	

***Declined-Did not interview	Yes	Interviewee # 8	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Yes	Interviewee # 9	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Yes	Interviewee # 10	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Yes	Interviewee # 11	RQ #2 = Theme 1	
	Yes	Interviewee # 12	RQ #1 = Theme 1	
	Declined	Interviewee # 13	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 14	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 15	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 16	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 17	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 18	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 19	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 20	N/A	N/A

<b>Q 10: Community Impact</b>  What impact do/did you wish to have on the community you serve or did serve?  Help = Make a difference. Change = Change the fire service for the better.  ***Declined-Did not interview	Help	Interviewee # 1	Chapter 4	
	Help	Interviewee # 2	Chapter 4	
	Help	Interviewee # 3	Chapter 4	
	Help	Interviewee # 4	Chapter 4	
	Help	Interviewee # 5	Chapter 4	
	Help	Interviewee # 6	Chapter 4	
	Help	Interviewee # 7	Chapter 4	
	Change	Interviewee # 8	Chapter 4	
	Help	Interviewee # 9	Chapter 4	
	Change	Interviewee # 10	Chapter 4	
	Change	Interviewee # 11	Chapter 4	
	Help	Interviewee # 12	Chapter 4	
	Declined	Interviewee # 13	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 14	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 15	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 16	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 17	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 18	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 19	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 20	N/A	N/A

<b>Q 11: Anything Additional to Add?</b>	No	Interviewee # 1	RQ #2 = Theme 2	
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<p>Is there anything you want to discuss that we did not discuss during these questions? Please share.</p> <p>No = Did not answer. Yes = Revisited previous answers. Asked = Asked to speak later.</p> <p>***Declined-Did not interview</p>	No	Interviewee # 2	RQ #3 = Theme 2	
	No	Interviewee # 3	RQ #3 = Theme 2	
	Yes	Interviewee # 4	RQ #3 = Theme 2	
	Yes	Interviewee # 5	RQ #2 = Theme 2	
	Yes	Interviewee # 6	RQ #2 = Theme 2	
	Yes	Interviewee # 7	RQ #2 = Theme 2	
	Yes	Interviewee # 8	RQ #2 = Theme 2	
	No	Interviewee # 9	RQ #2 = Theme 2	
	No	Interviewee # 10	RQ #2 = Theme 2	
	No	Interviewee # 11	RQ #3 = Theme 2	
	Asked	Interviewee # 12	RQ #3 = Theme 2	
	Declined	Interviewee # 13	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 14	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 15	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 16	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 17	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 18	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 19	N/A	N/A
	Declined	Interviewee # 20	N/A	N/A